THE
RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. III. November 5, 1937 Kislev 1, 5698 No. 13

EDITORIALS

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By Ben Zion Bokser

SOLOMON SCHECHTER'S PHILOSOPHY OF JUDAISM

(Concluded)

By Myer S. Kripke

Published by
THE SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM
15 West 86th Street, New York, N. Y.

Solomon Schechter's Philosophy of Judaism

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belief, then, we leave Schechter's writings with the question still unanswered, What may the modern Jew believe?

But even in the matter of Jewish practise, Schechter's writings are inadequate. For it has already been noted that modern men insist on an understanding of the value and social utility involved in any practise. Schechter pleaded for the strengthening of Jewish practise without giving it a rationale. If it were divinely ordained, it would need no rationale. But Schechter himself ascribed it rather to the developing life of Catholic Israel, and certainly most modern Jews do not accept the view that Jewish observance reflects directly the will of a God who expressly commanded it. What then is its value? Why keep the Sabbath in the Jewish way, the Festivals, the dietary laws, and other Jewish ceremonials? Schechter was again silent in the face of a crying need for reinterpretation of Jewish practises, a reinterpretation designed to give them meaning and significance for modern Jews, and to associate with them ideals and values which modern Jews are capable of experiencing.

Aside from intellectual problems, modern Jewry is faced with another problem, of practical significance, to which Schechter's solution is inadequate. This is the problem of the organization of Jewry. In his writing Schechter did not treat the problem at all. But his answer is embodied in an organization which he sponsored—the United Synagogue of America, whose first president he was. Now the organization of American-Jewish congregations into the United Synagogue speaks its purpose in its name: The attempt is only to reach a number of religious bodies of the same general tendencies. The difference between such an organization and one whose name might have been "The Union of Jewish Community Councils of America" is obvious. Had Schechter's strength and ability gone into the organization of local Jewish community councils, and the organization of these local bodies into a national union, a tremendous strengthening of Jewish life might have been accomplished by this time. But Schechter was satisfied with the United Synagogue. No doubt this goes back to his understanding of Judaism as a religion, not a civilization. Organization must then be on the basis of religion, not of community life. Schechter had not really come to an understanding of Judaism as a culture, as a civilization, which he himself hinted. So was the inadequacy of his thought carried over into an unfortunate inadequacy of action.

It is still the conviction of this reader that Schechter was a great Jew. His scholarly contributions alone and his activity at the Seminary justify that conviction. But he at no time reached an adequate understanding of Jewish life as an integrated whole. Indeed he did clarify two important points, the inadequacy of an Orthodoxy that denied modern science, and the inadequacy of a Reformism that denied Jewish national life and much of Jewish practise. But, although he himself hinted at it, he never came to the fullness of vision that would have enabled him to see Judaism in its totality, as a full civilization. Because of this, his writings reveal contradictions and wholesale evasions that make his teachings inadequate for the American Jew. Perhaps it was that he lived too early, a full generation too early, to recognize the needs of the time and to have the boldness to carry his scientific premises to their logical conclusions. Solomon Schechter a generation later might have departed from the ranks of a befuddled Conservative Judaism to a leading position in the ranks of those who attempt a renaissance of Jewish life through an integrated philosophy of Religious-Culturist Judaism.

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The RECONSTRUCTIONIST is published bi-weekly for twenty consecutive issues starting in October, by The Society for the Advancement of Judaism, 15 West 86th St., New York, N. Y. Subscription $1.00 a year; foreign $1.25; individual copy 10 cents. Entered as second class matter January 9, 1935, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.
The editorials represent the opinions of the editors only.
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EDITORIALS

Felix M. Warburg

FELIX M. WARBURG has been for so long an outstanding personality on the American and Jewish scene that most American Jews have come to take him and his interests for granted. Only now that he is gone is it to be discerned how many important causes will be adversely affected by his death.

His contributions to the general civic and cultural life of America were large and numerous. THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST is profoundly grateful for these, recognizing that his guidance and assistance will be missed widely. But large as was his role in these areas, it was by no means as singular as his place in the Jewish world specifically.

Felix M. Warburg was almost unique in his group. Affiliated by wealth, birth and social ties to the top stratum of American German Jews, he was, unlike his associates, no Jewish minimalist. A philanthropist, he was not content with philanthropy as a program for Jewish life. A religionist, he recognized that there was more to Judaism than religion alone.

In each of his incredibly numerous Jewish activities he transcended the lines of his class and rose above the prejudices of his group. His large donations to Jewish charities by no means exhausted his interest in Jewish communal problems. He was among the founders of the Kehillah of New York City, that magnificent but abortive attempt to introduce order into the chaos prevailing in the largest Jewish community in the world. And among his most recent endeavors was the organization of The National Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, a structure intended to coordinate nationally the philanthropies of the Jewish communities of America. In brief, he understood full well the necessity of planning in Jewish group life.

This breadth of his Jewish vision reveals itself nowhere more clearly than in the field of Jewish education. Where most of his personal associates are utterly indifferent to the necessity of transmitting the Jewish heritage and adapting it to the needs of contemporary life, he stood out virtually alone in his concern over adequate Jewish training. He was one of the major supporters of the Jewish Education Association, a friend and benefactor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. It was largely through his generosity that the Israel Friedlander Classes were initially launched. He was instrumental in establishing the Graduate School for Jewish Social Work so that the servants of the Jewish communities

throughout the country might come to their tasks scientifically prepared.

Formally no Zionist, he was none the less one of the most earnest and enthusiastic supporters of all phases of Jewish rehabilitation in Palestine. He was a conscientious and constructive member of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, and the largest single supporter of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. And at no time in his career did he rise to greater dimensions than at the great Madison Square mass meeting held in protest against the Passfield White Paper which threatened to terminate Zionist efforts. Few Jews will forget the earnestness and passion with which he spoke, the Jewish loyalties which he manifested, and the encouragement which he gave to the Jewish masses—an encouragement all the greater because it came from one who by economic position and social affiliation was so far removed from them.

Among his contributions to Jewish life not the least is one which is relatively inconspicuous. There was in him a profound sympathy for Jewish artistic expression. Many a musician and painter has had his constructive work encouraged and subsidized privately by him.

It is always impossible to analyze what it is which makes a human being what he ultimately turns out to be. But among the influences which worked upon Felix Warburg not the least was the orthodox upbringing which he received in Hamburg, a training which left him with a life-long love for many significant values in Jewish life.

His social philosophy was not that of THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST nor did his theory of Jewish life coincide with that for which this publication stands. He was furthermore a *shtadlan,* one of that small group which takes it upon itself to speak for all Jewry, and we have consistently urged that *Shtadlanut* be supplanted by democratic instruments for the expression of Jewish group will. But if he was a *Shtadlan,* he was a uniquely constructive one.

If we must have *Shtadlanut*—and we will until American Jews awake to the necessity of communal organization,—we are grateful for the breadth of interest and insight, the constructive contributions made by this finest representative of a phenomenon which will, and should, soon pass.

The whole of Jewry is impoverished by his death. For all our disagreements with his philosophy and with what he represented, we sincerely repeat, *Habal d'mabdin,* "Alas for those who depart and are no more."

Raising False Hopes

THOSE who have been giving serious consideration to the problem of the Jew in the modern world have long since come to realize that this problem is not one merely of theology. To be sure, the internal life of the Jewish people will not regain its former vitality and cogency until the masses of Jews are given a new orientation to the basic problems of life, and a new perspective upon their cultural heritage. But in recent years more and more of our people have come to understand that our problem is broader in scope, and includes the basic question of economic security.

In the early days of the Emancipation, such security was looked for in the prevailing economic setup. With the rise of modern anti-Semitism and with the contraction of economic possibilities, the economic salvation of the Jews in the diaspora ceased to be a foregone conclusion. The Zionist movement, in fact, arose from the conviction on the part of Jews that they could never hope for economic security outside their own homeland.

The new realities in Palestine today have now shaken the belief of even the most sanguine Zionists that Eretz Yisrael constitutes an economic haven for the largest majority of Jews whose lives are lived precariously in the diaspora. The advocates of Jewish statehood are basing

their arguments more upon the effect that political independence would have upon the status and dignity of diaspora Jewry than upon the opportunities which statehood would accord for the economic adjustment of the whole Jewish people.

Students of the Jewish social scene are slowly but surely growing to understand that the ultimate hope for our people lies in the fundamental revision of the entire economic structure. But this new Messiah may be long in coming, despite our most strenuous efforts in behalf of its advent. Something must be done quickly and effectively within the present structure to ameliorate the economic condition of our people. In this country we are in a position to learn from the unfortunate experiences of Jews in older lands, and economists among us have time and again warned us that occupational redistribution is a prerequisite to the fortification of our economic position. Occupational redistribution, as we have previously pointed out, requires research, guidance and planning which neither our general social nor specifically Jewish environment encourages. But within the limitations imposed, some planning is being done.

These considerations are inspired at this time by our fear that, in attempting to reckon with the entire problem, we may be misled somewhat by the overenthusiastic remarks of some of our Labor Zionist friends. In their efforts to arouse a well-deserved interest in the Labor Zionist movement, they tend to give the impression that American Jews may learn, among other things, new types of social organization from the *haluzim*. In addition to the cultural stimulus which modern Palestine offers, it is said, we may discover the social and economic experiments of the *k'vuzah* worthy of emulation.

It is frequently shown that Polish Jews, living communally on *haksharah* (preparatory) farms in anticipation of the receipt of their immigration certificates, manage for years at a stretch to solve their immediate economic problems by cooperative colony life. Perhaps, they say, these delays which compel them to remain in the cooperatives are a blessing in disguise, revealing new possibilities in social organization. The new restrictive measures limiting immigration to Palestine may similarly affect the *HeHaluz* experiments in this country, such as the one in Cream Ridge, New Jersey.

We hope that the Labor Zionists will not raise false hopes. Farming today is an already overcrowded profession, and experienced agriculturists find it difficult to maintain themselves; certainly novices would experience even greater difficulty. In our attempts at economic redistribution, agriculture, according to experts, offers the meagerest hope. *HeHaluz* should certainly win the support of large numbers of Jews. The Cream Ridge farm for the training of *haluzim* is a noble enterprise; and we hope that "*Hehaluz* Month" (October) proved to be highly successful. But we should be very much opposed to any attempt to justify our concern with Labor Palestine on the ground that American Jews might solve their economic problem through the cooperative colony.

The Wholesome Attitude Toward Assimilationists

IT would be interesting to know how the mass of Jewish readers react to incidents which reflect the unfriendly attitude of non-Jewish groups to the Jew who wishes to assimilate but is unequivocally, sometimes forcefully, rejected. Should it be cause for joy or for disappointment? Should such rejection be applauded or objected to? Should we shout "We told you so!" or should we take the injured one to our bosoms and sooth his damaged feelings to the best of our limited ability?

The New York *Times* carried a news item the other day to the effect that Dr. Alice Salomon, the "Jane Addams of Germany," had been expelled from her fatherland. "Now, at the age of sixty-five, she has been deprived of her means and her home, and headed toward an

unknown future. Of Jewish ancestry, she is a devoted Christian." But although penniless and adrift, she was "good-humored and without a trace of ill-feeling toward those who expelled her," the newspaper interviewer related.

Who is Alice Salomon? Perhaps her background can best be sketched by recalling an event in 1923. The National Conference of Social Work celebrated its fiftieth anniversary that year. As is usual on such occasions, the tendency is to break tradition, avoid the commonplace and take a wider and longer view of things. The Conference demonstrated this pattern by three departures: first, it emphasized an international approach to problems of social welfare; second, it brought the Church more clearly into relation with social service practices; and third, it secured outstanding foreign social workers to contribute to its program. Alice Salomon was invited because she was not alone Germany's leading social worker, but stood out in the front ranks of leadership in social work throughout Europe. She was the founder and director of the Berlin Training School for Social Workers, a member of nearly a score of important national and international boards and committees, and engaged in such a variety of progressive social legislation that not a single phase of public social work in Germany (before Hitler) failed to carry the impress of her thinking and her enterprise. Incidentally, her conference address bore the title: "The Relation of the Church to Social Workers." In her life and her work she represented the best in Christian Protestantism. She tried hard to maintain the assimilation she had achieved. But she was Jewish, according to the current Nazi standard of "Aryanism."

In the development of a healthy, wholesome Jewish reaction to this event, two very important attitudes should be emphasized. First, we must cease bemoaning assimilation as one of the tragic phenomena of Jewish life. As a matter of fact, Jewry stands to profit by the departure of those from its midst who can no longer honestly participate in Jewish group life or find it uncomfortable or "degrading." The *real* tragedy lies in the fact that too many assimilationists remain active in Jewish life to obstruct and vitiate the positive forces for its strengthening and its reconstruction. It is a futile and harmful pursuit for Jewry to engage in efforts at rescue, salvation and restoration for the assimilationist of long standing and of firm conviction. Secondly, as defenders of human rights we must insist upon the assimilationist's right to achieve the assimilation he is looking for. No group, no sect, no nation should easily be able to negative those needs of an individual which only assimilation can adequately satisfy.

The tragedy of Alice Salomon is not in her *own* failure to achieve assimilation, but in the failure of her compatriots to grant her the decencies to which human beings are entitled, to make her assimilation perfect.

Jewish Life in Mexico

By Ben Zion Bokser

THE post-war crisis which overwhelmed the Jewish settlements in Eastern Europe sent many Jews to seek new homes on this side of the Atlantic. Their heart's desire was in every instance the United States, but stringent immigration laws forced them to go elsewhere. Cuba, Argentine, Venezuela, Colombia and a number of other American republics received their share of Jewish wanderers. The Jewish population in all these countries is relatively small. But everywhere these new settlers are carrying on an enterprising group life and, in varying measure and form, are writing new and colorful chapters in the history of the Jewish diaspora. Perhaps the outstanding of these newer Jewish communities is that in the republic of Mexico.

Until 1857 Mexico was officially closed to all non-Catholics. People of Jewish blood, to be sure, played their part in the early period of Mexican history. There were a number of Marannos among the Spanish conquerors and settlers who originally crossed the Rio Grande. The Inquisition, however, stood on guard against all defections from the dominant faith and Judaizing heretics were sought out and dealt with according to the usual rigor of traditional Catholic law. In the three years between 1642 and 1645 alone, no less than 107 persons were charged with Judaizing, and at least one of them, Thomas Trebino de Sobremonte, died at the stake on April 11, 1649. It was only with the triumph of revolutionary liberalism under President Benito Juarez when the old link between church and state was formally dissolved that heretics and non-believers could establish a legal residence in Mexico.

The earliest Jewish settlers were Sephardim, who came some twenty-five years ago from Turkey, Greece, Persia, Syria and other countries in the near East. There are now approximately 5,000 of them and they live their group life apart from the other Jews in Mexico. Zionism alone has on occasions been able to bridge the gap and bring Sephardic and East European Jews together for common objectives. A protest meeting against the partition of Palestine recently held in Mexico City had the full backing of all Jewish organizations in the city, including the Sephardic, and a representative of the Sephardic Zionists addressed the gathering in Spanish. Ethnically and linguistically, the Sephardic immigrants were much closer to the Spanish and Mexican types, which simplified their adjustment to the new environment. They are practically all very well situated economically, with important positions in commerce and industry. With time, they will approach a full integration with the rest of Mexico.

The East European Jewish settlement was really started during the World War when a number of Jews of East European extraction fled the United States to Mexico in order to escape the draft.

A mass settlement did not begin until President Plutarco E. Calles extended Mexico's hospitality to the would-be Jewish immigrants from Poland, Lithuania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. In 1924, 400 immigrants arrived. Immigration remained unrestricted till 1930. Present laws limit immigration to technicians and skilled craftsmen for whom there is a specific demand in Mexican commerce or industry. This has reduced the number of new Jewish arrivals, but Jewish firms are continuing to bring "technicians" and "craftsmen" from the ghettos of Poland. Close to 15,000 Jews have thus arrived in the last 13 years. To most of them Mexico was only a stopping point on the way to

the land of real promise — the United States. But from a temporary refuge Mexico has turned out to be a home that has offered peace, economic security and the promise of a brighter morrow.

The social background of the Jewish immigrant masses reinforced by certain conditions prevailing in Mexico forced the Jewish group into its traditional middle class role. Alienated from the soil by centuries of urban life, the Jews very naturally made no strenuous efforts to earn their livelihood by agriculture. Mexican law, moreover, in order to save the labor market for the indigenous worker, has limited the employment of foreigners to 10 percent of the personnel in any unit of industry or commerce. What else could the Jewish immigrant turn to but peddling? Neckties, shoe laces, and strangely enough, crucifixes, were the popular commodities in his pack and with them he roamed the streets of Mexico City and the provinces. The American members of the colony generally imported these commodities from the United States, and the newer arrivals from Poland sold them to the Mexican home. But from the peddler's pack to the store is but a step, and that step was taken very rapidly. It was not long, too, before some Jews conceived of the possibility of manufacturing their own goods instead of paying the higher costs involved in importing from the United States. With little competition, the Jews made tremendous headway both in commerce and in industry. Jews created and now control practically all of Mexico's light industry—textiles, cloaks and suits, sweaters, shoes, hats, neckties and a host of other commodities. For mutual protection and help they have formed a bank of their own and a Jewish chamber of commerce which speaks for all Jews on economic as well as civic and political matters. In creating this native industry the Jews made, of course, a significant contribution to the economic development of Mexico. But they also achieved affluence and economic power for themselves. The comparative well-being of Mexican Jewry is attested to by the fact that there were no claimants upon a relief fund of 4,000 pesos which the community had made available for distribution before Passover.

Relative economic homogeneity did not efface the social differences that the Jewish settlers brought with them from the old world. And this small community divides itself socially and politically into a number of hostile groups and factions. At the extreme right there is a religious group with a community organization, *Nidhe Yisrael,* which some like to call the Mexican Kehillah, but which follows the pattern of the typical Orthodox synagogue. It conducts religious services, maintains a cemetery and supports a Talmud Torah which is attended by about 100 children. For the present all the activities of the *Nidhe Yisrael* are housed in temporary quarters, but plans are under way for the construction of an elaborate synagogue building in one of the more fashionable neighborhoods of the city. This ambitious building project must not be interpreted as a symbol of great devotion to religion. It is only on special occasions like the High Holidays or at a memorial service or a Bar Mizvah celebration that any appreciable number of Jews ever attend the synagogue. Throughout the year even the affiliated are quite passive in their loyaity. Economic necessity has destroyed the Sabbath and therefore synagogue attendance in Mexico, as it has destroyed it in the United States. The forces of modernism moreover had already undermined the Orthodoxy of many of the immigrants long before they left the ghettos of Poland. Religion, too, is generally unpopular on the Mexican scene as a result of the old political struggle between the state and the Catholic Church, and this has had its reverberations on the Jewish community as well.

Zionism is popular and has a large following. The Revisionists, the Poale Zion, the League for Labor Palestine, the Mizrahi as well as the General Zionist Organization, all have their functioning organ-

izations. The General Zionists boast of a membership of over 400. The strength of Zionist interest in the community was illustrated by a recent protest meeting against the partition of Palestine, which drew an attendance of over 800 people. Zionism has an effective instrument of propaganda in *Der Weg,* a liberal newspaper that appears twice weekly.

One of the most significant achievements of the groups identified with Zionism is the *Colegio Israelita,* a school offering a Jewish education together with instruction in all general subjects taught by the official elementary schools of the state. The school was started in 1924 and its present enrollment is over 400. Thirty teachers, all Mexican, teach in the general department and Spanish is the official language of instruction. The Jewish department is staffed by six teachers, all of them graduates of Jewish Teachers' Seminaries in Poland. The curriculum includes Hebrew and Yiddish literature, Jewish history, customs, music and arts and crafts. As a carry-over of the government's struggle to secularize education, all instruction in religion is prohibited even in private schools. Neither this school nor the Talmud Torah maintained by the *Nidhe Yisrael* may, therefore, teach Bible or any other subject that may be labeled as specifically religious. Such subjects if taught at all, are taught surrepitiously. Officially both these schools are regarded as academies for the study of foreign languages. The *Colegio* has official government recognition. Indeed, the government even subsidizes it to the extent of 600 pesos a year. The total budget of the school is 75,000 pesos a year.

At the extreme left is a small communist group and a larger group of Bundists. Because of local conditions, all revolutionary groups in Mexico are strongly nationalistic in their propaganda as well as in outlook. Even the Communist Party has therefore been afraid to discredit itself before the general public by permitting foreigners to represent it on the Mexican scene. Jewish communists have consequently been forced to limit themselves to functioning within the Jewish community. They are organized in a cell with a membership of 14. The head of the group is a political refugee from Rumania who is teaching physics in the local university. Another is a former student of Hunter College who hitch-hiked six years ago from New York on a party mission and is now employed in the translation department at the Ministry of Education. Two others, also Americans, are employed as instructors of English, one in the local city high school, and the other in the Workers' University. The communists control a mass organization *Gezbir* (after the Russian Gezerd and Biro-Bidjan), which tries to popularize the Soviet Union and particularly Biro-Bidjan among the Jewish masses. They are also boring within a number of middle class groups; their influence is particularly strong in the Maccabees, a Zionist youth organization.

Far more militant is the Bund. Though most of its members have now become wealthy merchants and industrialists, they still remember the slogans of the old Polish hometown and are continuing the battle against God and capitalism. The medium within which they must function as well as their own economic status have forced the Bundists to concentrate their activities on the cultural front. They organized a Jewish *Kultur* League, which has a membership of over 100, and which sponsors lectures and discussions on literary themes from a Bundist point of view. A Bundist cooperative of some 80 members publishes a newspaper *Die Zeit,* which appears twice weekly. Its circulation is approximately 1,200. Jacob Pat, a Bundist leader from Poland, recently visited the Jewish colony in Mexico and he managed to draw large crowds to all his public appearances.

The Bund has waged a bitter war against Zionism. Bundists succeeded in winning control of the local YHMA in the July elections of 1936 and one of their

first acts was to call a special meeting to "enlighten the Zionists." The Zionist organization was denounced and its leadership reviled in the most acrimonious terms. A threatened break in the organization followed, with 90 members signing a letter of non-confidence in the leadership. On November 3, 1936 a new election was held and a pro-Zionist executive committee was chosen. The Bund has been equally outspoken in its campaign against religion, and one of the crimes with which they charge the communists is their willingness to enter into united fronts with rabbis, and ministers of the church. The communists have of course denounced the Bundists as Trotzkyites. There is indeed a faction in the Bund with Trotzkyite leanings, and it is strongly reflected in the columns of the *Zeit.*

What of anti-Semitism in Mexico? Anti-Jewish groups exist, and they are conducting the usual anti-Semitic polemics. But the government and the base of poplar support on which it rests are a guarantee that Jewish rights will not be violated. The present Mexican regime may be described as a popular front government with strong socialistic tendencies. As such it recognizes that fascism is its great enemy and that anti-Semitism is the spearhead of fascism. With the same weapons that it struggles against the forces of fascism it struggles therefore also against anti-Semitism. It permits anti-Semitic agitation on the same grounds that it permits anti-democratic agitation; it is determined to preserve a free press even during the period of socialist reconstruction. It does not, however, carry the liberties of democracy to the limits of their logic, and it has outlawed the political organization of fascist and anti-Semitic groups. The anti-Semitic *Gold Shirts* were dissolved. A more recent group of fascists and anti-Semites calling themselves, strangely enough, Social Democrats, was also liquidated.

Behind the government there stands an alert working class. The employees in a Mexico City printing establishment recently went out on strike because the manager had innocently used a swastika to decorate a local theater program. Events in Germany and Spain have been a useful lesson to the Mexican masses and they are determined to preserve the government under which they now live. Political and social currents shift very rapidly in Mexico and it is, of course, difficult to predict what the future may bring. If the present regime should fall, Mexican Jews, being both aliens and members of the middle class, would form easy targets for anti-Semitic propaganda. But Cardenas is more popular than ever and, barring intervention from a foreign power, all indications point to an intensification of the trends to socialism rather than to fascism. In a world turbulent with bigotry and Jew hatred, Mexico stands out as a new land of promise for at least a small section of our troubled people.

Solomon Schechter's Philosophy of Judaism

(*Concluded*)

By Myer *S.* Kripke

II

The Jewish Way of Life

It was impossible to omit from Schechter's opinions on the Jewish religion, discussed above, his opinions on the Jewish way of life. For Schechter believed that the way of life offered by Judaism was part of its religion. Jewish life consisted only in the religion, and with the abrogation of the Torah, Judaism would die.

Accordingly, it is very difficult to find his opinions on the Jewish way of life as such, because of the simple fact that he believed that in itself there was no Jewish life. One may only repeat his views on the Jewish way of life as they were defined in discussion of his attitude toward the Jewish religion. These may be stated again, in brief, as follows:

1. The sanction for any practise or ceremonial must come from the will of Catholic Israel.

2. The ceremonials of Judaism are designed to maintain a *national* aspect of Jewish life, as well as a *religious* aspect.

3. This national life of the Jewish people is a developing, changing organism.

4. The character of this development is such that no practise or ceremonial may be dropped or a new one added without the consent of Catholic Israel.

Despite the limitations of these views of Schechter, there are to be found in his writings a few faint glimmers of an attitude far broader and far more embracing. In his criticism of Abraham Geiger and of the trend of thinking that led to Reformism, Schechter made this important statement:

> "Now as to Jewish nationalism, it is not a creation of the nineteenth century. Its compact with religion was eternal. If in the Maccabean times the nation arose in arms to defend its religion, the reverse happened after the destruction of the holy Temple and the successive spread of Christiianity, when religion took the Jewish nation under its protection and consecrated it forever. . . . It was just those things which distinguished us from our surroundings. . . . the Pentateuch . . . . the Sabbath, the Covenant of Abraham . . . the dietary laws, to which we clung for thousands of years with all our life and for which we brought numberless sacrifices."

Here we have the important recognition by Schechter of the existence of a national-cultural life alongside Jewish religious life, that separated Jews from other nations.

Now the Reformist Jews, as well as Schechter, recognized the existence of that national-cultural life in the *past*. But Geiger and the Reformists were willing to give up the differential of the Jewish people, and maintain henceforth only an emasculated Jewish religion as the sum-total of Jewish life. It is this tendency against which Schechter inveighed, maintaining that Judaism's national-cultural life's "compact with religion was eternal. . . . Is this now the time to destroy it?" It was on this point that Schechter definitely parted company with the Reformists, who maintained that Judaism was a religion only. It will be quickly seen, further, that this view definitely contradicted the opinion of Schechter given above—an opinion in consonance with the viewpoint of Orthodox Judaism—that recognized no Jewish national-cultural life distinct from Jewish religious life.

In the same essay with the important statement noted above, Schechter went even further, implying the existence of what may be termed *folkways* of the Jew-

ish people. He contrasts with Geiger's views the views of Zunz:

> "Zunz never apologized for the existence of Israel. According to him, the separateness of Israel, forming an entity, both as a nationality and as a religion, are facts recognized by history, and there is no need of apologizing for them. Israel was accordingly justified in looking back to its great achievements—spiritual and material—in the past, and to cherish its hopes for a glorious future; to live its own life, to think its own thought and zealously to guard its identity both as a nationality and a religion through the means of symbols and ceremonies and a sacred language of its own, and even to possess a code of etiquette and manners of its own, all calculated to perpetuate its existence."

Now this is the view of Zunz, not of Schechter. But Schechter quoted it favorably in contrast to the view of Geiger, of which he disapproved. The implication is clear: Schechter also was willing to maintain that Jewish practise was not only a part of the religious life of Israel, but a part of Jewish national life as well. And this life was the reflection of the spirit of the people, "living its own life," developing habits of action and conduct that had nothing to do with religion and were only the customs—the folkways—of a people freely developing, creating even its own manners and code of etiquette. Such a view implies that Judaism is far broader than a religion, that it is, in fact, a full culture or civilization. And in his disapproval of Geiger's view, Schechter did make the final step—timidly, to be sure:

> "The religious teaching of Israel has therefore more value for Geiger than the religious life of Israel, not to speak of its peculiar civilization (Kultur), so far as it developed on lines of its own, to which civilization they had hardly a right."

To Schechter, in this flickering gleam of a new view of Judaism, the Jews *did* have a right to their own peculiar civilization.

III

The Nationhood of the Jewish People

Schechter's views on the nationhood of the Jewish people are far easier to determine than those on the Jewish way of life, for the controversy that centered about the Zionist movement in its early stages forced a definite statement on the question. From what has been said, it should be sufficiently clear that Schechter did believe that the Jews constituted a nation, not only a religious group. It will be worthwhile, however, to search out his views on Jewish nationhood in greater detail.

In the first place, Schechter recognized the natural right of the Jewish people to its national-religious life. He refused to believe that the Jewish religion existed because other regions are imperfect. Similarly, he held that the Jewish nation has a right to exist not because it has specific purposes, but because historically it has existed and does exist. He approved of the view of Zunz:

> "Zunz never apologized for the existence of Israel. According to him, the separateness of Israel, forming an entity, both as a nationality and as a religion, are facts recognized by history, and there is no need for apologizing for them."

Nevertheless, despite this recognition, Schechter did at times apologize for the existence of Israel and give it a *raison d'etre*.

> ". . . we live in an age in which everybody must show his credentials from the past. The Bible is our patent of nobility granted us by the Almighty God, and if we disown the Bible . . . the world will disown us. There is no room in it for spiritual parvenus."
>
> "Our great claim to the gratitude of mankind is that we gave the world the word of God, the Bible. . . . We covered it against every attack. . . . We bore witness to its truth and watched over its purity in the face of a hostile world. The Bible is our sole *raison d'etre,* and it is just this which the Higher anti-Semitism is seeking to destroy, denying all our claims for the past, and leaving us without hope for the future."

In such passages Schechter approached the Reformist and Neo-Orthodox version of the "mission of Israel" and it will be well to clarify his views on that point. His writings point at times to such a belief in a mission:

"I think that even the most advanced Bible critic . . . must perceive in such passages as, 'The Lord shall reign for ever and ever' . . . and many others, a hope for more than the establishment of the "national Deity among his votaries in Palestine."

"One might again propose an article to the effect that Judaism is a proselytizing religion, having the mission to bring about God's kingdom on earth, and to include in that kingdom all mankind."

"Judaism means to convert the world, not to convert itself. . . . It has confidence in the world; it hopes, it prays, and waits patiently for the great day when the world will be ripe for its acceptance."

"But perhaps the saddest feature amid so much that is farcical is that we still profess to have a mission to the world. . . . But is the constant endeavor to level down the intellectual standard to that of our surroundings compatible with the missionary idea?"

"If, then, our endless talk about a religious mission is not to degenerate into mere cant, a religious atmosphere will have to be created quite different from that in which we have lived hitherto."

"Universality means . . . what it meant to the prophets and their *Jewish* successors—that the whole world should become Jews, not that Judaism should fade out into the world."

These passages are obviously close to the Reformist ideal of a mission for the Jews in the world, to maintain the Bible and its teachings, to instruct mankind in religion, to win the world over to an understanding and acceptance of Judaism—in short, to convert mankind.

There is an obvious contradiction between this acceptance of the mission-idea and Schechter's belief in the natural right of the Jewish people to exist, as established by history and quite apart from any purpose it may have. All that may be said regarding this contradiction is that all the passages describing Israel's mission were written in 1901 or earlier. The passage accepting Israel's existence as a natural right dates from 1910. Probably Schechter's view changed during this period. Indeed a direct reference in this essay of 1910 denies the mission-idea, or at least speaks of it disparagingly:

"As with all reformers the mission doctrine formed a most important feature in Geiger's theology. Indeed he exclaims in one place: 'We would have to cease to be Jews were we to believe that our historical mission in the world has reached its end.' This sounds very solemn and inspiring. For our part we prefer unconditional Judaism."

It is noteworthy in this connection, that nowhere in his writings did Schechter make a definite statement with regard to the doctrine of the Chosen People. His belief in this doctrine probably paralleled his views on a Jewish mission to the world. Had he retained the doctrine of the Chosen People, he would have been forced to retain the idea of a Jewish mission. Without it, he was free to reject the mission-idea and maintain instead the natural right of a people to live its own life for its own sake.

It was in accordance with this view of Jewish national life that Schechter recognized the possibility of diversity of opinion and belief within Judaism. Membership in the people was not dependent upon acceptance of a particular religious philosophy, which it was the mission of Israel to promulgate. It depended upon birth into the Jewish people and participation in its life. Thus Schechter said:

"The Torah gave spiritual accommodation for thousands of years to all sorts and conditions of men, sages, philosophers, scholars, mystics, casuists, schoolmen, and skeptics; and it should also prove broad enough to harbor the different minds of the present century."

At one point he illustrated this view by using Maimonides and Rashi as a case in point. They lived under completely different circumstances. But they cherished the same feasts, symbols, language, historic past, hopes of redemption, laws, aspirations for the Jewish people. And these bonds of unity made them members of the same religion and the same people. Membership in the people was conditional only upon participation in its life.

Schechter believed without qualification in the desirability of establishing an independent Jewish life once again, an independent national life in a national homeland. He clarified his view when he accepted Zionism and pointed out the common goal of all Zionist activity:

> "Zionism is an ideal and as such indefinable. It is thus subject to various interpretations and susceptive of different aspects. . . . On one point, however . . . all agree, namely, that it is not only desirable, but absolutely necessary, that Palestine, the land of our fathers, should be recovered with the purpose of forming a home for at least a portion of the Jews who would lead there an independent national life."

He believed that the settlement of at least part of the Jewish people in Palestine, allowing the unhampered development of a section of the Jewish people, would serve to rejuvenate and strengthen Jewish religious and national life:

> "I belong to that class of Zionists that lay more stress on the religious-national aspects of Zionism than any other feature peculiar to it. The rebirth of Israel's national consciousness, and the revival of Israel's religion, or, to use a shorter term, the revival of Judaism, are inseparable."

In a generation when Zionism was still taboo to most religious Jews, Schechter insisted that its goal was desirable, even necessary. The life of Israel as a people was to him of the utmost importance. He criticized Geiger severely for minimizing the *Israel* idea in his thinking, and for considering "Israel's life as a people only as a temporary husk."

With this emphasis on the desirability of Jewish national life in Schechter's thinking, went a corresponding fear of assimilation. Time and again he raised his voice against the idea of a universal religion in which Judaism as such would cease to exist, in which Israel would be absorbed into its surroundings. He maintained that Zionism would be an impregnable bulwark against assimilation, and as such it should be cultivated.

> "Zionism declares boldly to the world that Judaism means to preserve its life by *not* losing its life. It shall be a true and healthy life, with a policy of its own, a religion wholly its own, invigorated by sacred memories and sacred environments, and proving a tower of strength and of unity not only for the remnant gathered within the borders of the Holy Land, but also for those who shall, by choice or necessity, prefer what now constitutes the Galuth."

It should be made clear, of course, that Schechter did not fear the kind of assimilation which meant merely Americanization. He meant by assimilation the loss of identity.

When it came to the question of what this national life of the Jewish people was to be, how it was to develop and how changes might be introduced, what elements its culture would comprise and along what lines cultural development was to take place, Schechter was silent. He did, it is true, recognize the importance of the Jewish national homeland in this rebirth of Jewish culture, and the necessity of maintaining the Hebrew language as an integral part of this culture. But nowhere did he give his reader a statement telling what purpose Jewish national life would serve, and what the Jew might expect from Judaism. He defended the natural right of Jews to a national life and inveighed against the assimilation of the Jew. But his writings are nowhere concerned with what that national life was to be.

A Critique of Schechter's Philosophy of Judaism

The foregoing pages have given a brief account of the opinions of Solomon Schechter touching the three focal points of Judaism: the Jewish religion, the Jewish way of life, and the nationhood of the Jewish people. It will be the purpose of the following remarks to determine the value of these views by applying the tests of self-consistency, applicability in the modern world, and adequacy in the face of the crisis in Jewish life today.

The reader must already have noted several inconsistencies in Schechter's opinions as given above. It will be well, however, to bring contradictory views into sharper contrast, for the sake of clarity.

In the first place, Schechter was not consistent in his definition of Judaism. He repeated often that Judaism is a revealed *religion.* But this view is contradictory both to his acceptance of the method of modern critical research, which denies revelation, and with his own

realization later in life that Judaism is more than a religion, and comprise instead a full civilization.

His acceptance of Judaism as a revealed religion is further inconsistent with his acceptance of Catholic Israel as the criterion of the authenticity of a belief or practise; for if a matter is divinely revealed, it is clearly unchangeable for all time, not even by the consent of the entire people, unless it is altered by a subsequent revelation. Unable to accept revelation, Schechter was driven to uphold Catholic Israel as the only authority capable of sanctioning changes in belief or practise. But it is exceedingly difficult to see how any change may take place if Catholic Israel is the authority. For an impasse is reached similar to the one Pope constructed in his epigrammatic couplet,

> "Be not the first by whom the new are tried,
> Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

For if no one may be the first to try the new, there can be no change at all. Similarly, if one observed the principle of not introducing anything not already accepted by Catholic Israel, nothing can be introduced. And if no one may be the first to drop anything Catholic Israel has not given up, nothing may be dropped. . . . Yet Schechter calls Judaism a developing organism.

This inconsistency is made all the more glaring by Schechter's insistence on observance of all of the Torah, holding that we need give up no part of it in America. He consistently refused to define what he meant by the Torah, whether, for example, it included all of the minute details of observance as given in the *Shulhan Aruk*. Yet he pleaded for its observance. At the same time he spoke of Judaism as a developing organism (which must change under new conditions) and advocated the scientific method of research into religion (which implies the right to drop a practise which no longer serves a purpose).

If one were to attempt to find the weakest link in the chain of ideas that Schechter presented, he might well be tempted to choose Schechter's position on *change*. For consistency with the scholarly attitude with which Schechter approached Judaism would have required him to state how change can come about, and above all, what direction that change should take. A modern outlook would have commanded him consciously to realize the dangers in Jewish life at present and to take deliberate steps to correct conditions that might lead to the doom of Judaism. But Schechter fell back on the consensus of opinion of Catholic Israel. The best that he can tell us is that we must observe the Torah.

For that matter, this insistence on observance of the Torah is inconsistent with Schechter's recognition of the possibility of diversity within Jewish life. He saw the possibility of skepticism and recognized the inevitability of different types of minds. He maintained that there was room for all of these within the Torah. Nevertheless he insisted upon careful observance of the precepts of the Torah, which might certainly be questioned by a skeptical mind.

Another inconsistency, which was noted when the contradictory views were first discussed above, is his postulation of a mission for Israel and his later recognition that Jewish national life existed by a natural historical right.

These inconsistencies in his opinions show the state of uncertainty of mind in which Schechter labored as he wrote on Jewish problems. It seems apparent to this reader that he never reached a full and complete philosophy of Jewish life, integrated and well-rounded. This explains not only the existence of these inconsistencies, but Schechter's reluctance, as well, to speak his mind on many problems of pressing importance and to speak only vaguely and in uncertain terms where he did venture his opinions.

It is not only these inconsistencies, however, that render Schechter's philosophy inadequate. Scientific scholar though he was, Schechter was unwilling to take an important step that the modern, scientific approach to religion demands. He

stated emphatically that he desired to accept the scientific method in dealing with the Jewish religion,and he indicated clearly that only by the development of a science of Judaism could we hope to answer our problems. Yet his philosophy of Judaism remains inapplicable in the face of present problems of Jewish life, because of the absence of an important requirement: Modern men demand that there be a clearly recognized value in any ceremonial or observance. Schechter insisted on Jewish observance without being willing to state which observances he considers essential, contenting himself only with an insistence on observance of the Torah. Such a view fails to strike a note of response in the mind of modern Jews, for if there was ever a time when men asked Why? it is today. What is the social utility of Jewish practises? What is their value? Here Schechter fell far short of the crying need for reinterpretation of Jewish practises, designed to give meaning to them in the modern world.

Just as Schechter refused to list and define Jewish ceremonials, so did he refuse to list and define Jewish dogmas .Because of this the modern man has the same quarrel with him here as on the question of observance: What are these dogmas? Are they consistent with modern thought? May they be dropped if they oppose modern thought? Schechter's silence on these questions is a grave defect, from the point of view of the applicability of his philosophy in the modern world.

A further defect from this point of view is Schechter's failure to take cognizance of the desire of modern man for aesthetic enjoyment of his way of life. At no point did Schechter point out how the modern Jew may find genuine aesthetic thrill in the creation and enjoyment of a revitalized Jewish culture. He touched briefly on the moral values of Jewish ethics, but nowhere did he discuss the aesthetic value of Jewish customs and observances.

It is not only because of inconsistencies and inapplicability in the modern world that Schechter's philosophy of Judaism must be disappointing to the reader, but also because of its failure in a third test: Does it answer specific problems of Judaism today?

Basic to Schechter's refusal to answer many serious problems of Jewish life, was his refusal to consider Judaism a problem altogether. He resented the familiar expression "the Jewish problem." He did not want to be considered a problem either to the world or to himself. He preferred to let Judaism take its own course and not to treat it consciously and deliberately, as a problem requiring the exercise of intelligence and control.

It has already been noticed that Schechter avoided the intellectual problem of divine revelation, upon which so much depends. The impression gathered from a reading of his works, it will be remembered, was that his use of the term "revealed religion" was not intended literally, for he accepted the scientific method of research and Biblical criticism.

For that matter Schechter's writings are likewise completely silent on the question of Jewish beliefs altogether. They refer several times to Jewish dogmas, but nowhere are these listed and nowhere discussed from the point of view of contemporary belief. Even the idea of God that may be held by a Jew today is given no place in Schechter's writings. He neither denied nor accepted belief in other-worldly salvation. If he denied it, he offered no substitute, such as an aesthetic appreciation of Jewish and American life would have been, or the attainment of happiness in this world. At one point he mentioned Providence and Reward and Punishment. But he was careful to avoid any personal commitment on these doctrines. In short, following Zacharias Frankel, who influenced him profoundly, he was silent on all questions of Jewish belief, maintaining that no effort should be made to reconstruct Jewish belief, that we should content ourselves with strengthening Jewish practise. On the question of Jewish

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